[For information on boats and boat equipment and on the pearling industry, see MI1 Kuwait, 1: Dickson, Category 116, pp. 473 to 496.]

[For bibliographical references, see complete text.]

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

MA 396 501

galleon. *Baggalas*, being both costly to build and unwieldy in a seaway, are now unfashionable. A *boom* is both cheaper and much easier to build, and carries just as much. Her sharp stern makes her safer in a seaway, though it is no part of her builder's plan that her *nakhodas* will try her qualities in a storm. Their sailing, he hopes, will be confined to sunny seas and more or less favorable winds; therefore the clumsy lateen rig will do.

K MA 501 505

The lateen is awkward but cheap; it demands a big crew, but these are cheap, too, for they are the sailmakers and riggers as well as mariners, and their only cost is an agreed share in the ship's earnings. The lateen is a grand pulling sail, and the dhows sail handsomely in their own conditions. There is nothing clumsy about them, though their fish-oiled hulls smell abominably and their underwater bodies are preserved by a mixture of tallow and lime, rubbed on by hand and renewed quarterly. The sailors do this work, as well as handle all the cargoes, keep the passengers in order and extol the merits of their ship so that more passengers might sail with her, tow the ship with her own longboat and propel the smaller dhows by sweeps, in calms, and fight for her if need be. The Kuwait dhows today are never armed, though the Suri may be.

K MA [565]

III

K MA 506 501 439

A brief description of my personal experiences will serve to illustrate a typical East African voyage.[1] I sailed in a Kuwait dhow of the *boom* type, a vessel of 2,000 date-packages capacity — perhaps 150 tons — which had a crew of twenty-eight. She carried something between 120 and 180 passengers, although her hold was full of salt and rice, and her decks were already crowded with a large longboat, a small gig, and a dhow under construction for sale at Lamu.

K MA 439 505

I joined the vessel at Ma'alla, the native port of Aden. She had already been several months at sea, peddling a full cargo of dates from Fao (by the mouth of the Basra river) around the coast of the Hadhramaut, and to Berbera. When I joined her, she had been hauled out on the beach at Ma'alla and her bottom

K MA 113

[1] The voyage here summarized is described in detail in the author's *Sons of Sinbad* (New York, 1940).

S. Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

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FIG. 2—Arab boys fishing with hand lines. When the fish are running, small boys often line the shore by the dozen.

the Koran, but a particularly juicy delicacy from a fish's point of view. The Arabs dot the shallow water with these basket traps at points where feeding appears good; the edges of small coral reefs are favorite spots.

The Arab fisherman never marks his traps with floats as the American lobster fisherman does, because he fears they will be plundered; he must remember the location of each trap. Where he cannot see the bottom, he suspends a float several feet below low-tide level. To tend his traps, this Arab rows his small boat up and down at low tide until he spies his trap or float and hooks it with a pole; in shallow water he sometimes dives for the trap. I once watched a crew of three fishermen off Ras Tanura; they seemed to know the approximate location of each trap in the 30 feet of water, but they spent as much as a quarter of an hour peering into the water to find each submerged float. These men used the largest wire traps I saw in the Persian Gulf, and their catch at times was astounding.

The Arabs on the east coast of Arabia seldom use seines, though on Bahrein Island I saw several drying in the sun. However, large communal seines have apparently been used on the Batinah Coast of Oman; for Thomas[1] relates that "there, a hundred fishermen were hauling ashore a communally owned net, the vast extent of which was marked by distant bobbing floats . . . In contrast, a lone fisherman, far out, monotonously cast his circular hand-net." On the Hadhramaut coast of South Arabia the fishermen also use large seines. At Mukalla I saw a two-and-a-half-inch-mesh net 190 feet long and 20 feet wide; a narrower net had a mesh of five inches. These wide-mesh nets are used for sharks. Farther east on this coast, at Jazir Bay, the fishermen set their seines by swimming out to sea on inflated sheepskins!

[1] Bertram Thomas: Alarms and Excursions in Arabia, London, 1931, p. 156.

wave action, completely leveled almost all the 10 fishweirs on the Tarut Bay side of the Ras Tanura peninsula. All during the fishing season constant maintenance is necessary (Fig. 13).

Because of its shoal water, Tarut Bay is the only place along the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia where large fishweirs can be built, and one of the best weir locations in Tarut Bay is off the Ras Tanura peninsula. Things went peacefully among the weir tenders and owners until 1945, when the Saudi Arabian refinery project started in high gear. A deepwater oil-loading pier was built on the Gulf side of the end of the peninsula, and a huge pipeway was run from this pier to the refinery, some eight miles away. The pipeway passed close to several of the Tarut Bay fishweirs, and the considerable fill dumped into the bay changed the shore contour slightly

The Arab fishweir owners, ever alert to monetary opportunity, brought suits against the Arabian American Oil Company, asserting that the change in contour had reduced their fish catches and that the company's grading equipment had damaged some of their weirs. After the refinery was partly completed in October, 1945, oil was occasionally spilled into Tarut Bay and provided another complaint for the Arabs, who said that the oil contaminated their weirs. These complaints were such an annoyance to the oil-company executives that they instructed their agents to buy the fishweir rights. By 1947 only three of the original 10 weirs were left; the total price paid was about 72,000 Saudi riyals ($22,000). This money enriched the few Arabs who held the rights to the weirs, but to the Arabs in the Qatif Ras Tanura area the sale was an economic blow. for much of the fish supplied to Hasa Province came from the Ras Tanura traps.

Rock Mining

Another marine occupation is the "mining" of dead coral rock. Two types of coral are mined: *faroush* and *hasa*. Faroush is found on flat bottoms in level layers three to six inches thick. Four-man diving crews, operating from shallow-draft dhows[1] 30 to 45 feet long, pry a huge slab loose with iron bars or by simply lifting its edge. A rope is thrown around the slab, and it is hauled to the dhow, where it is broken up into easily handled pieces (Fig. 14). Diving for faroush can be relatively dangerous: I saw a diver with

[1] For a description of the dhows used in the marine industries of eastern Arabia see R. LeB. Bowen, Jr.: Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia, *Amer. Neptune*, Vol. 9, 1949, pp. 87–132. The dhows are usually *jalbuts* (see Fig. 3 of the present article), but Bahrein and Kuwait send many *booms* and *sambuks* to the pearl fisheries in addition to the jalbuts. A few small *shoaes* and *hallums* are also used by the fishermen (see Fig. 4 of the present article).

3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

wages, they are given cash advances and food during the winter and during slack periods. They never seem able to pay off their debts to the dhow owners.

PEARLING

The most colorful marine industry of the Persian Gulf is pearling.[1] Pearling is definitely a seasonal occupation, confined to the months when

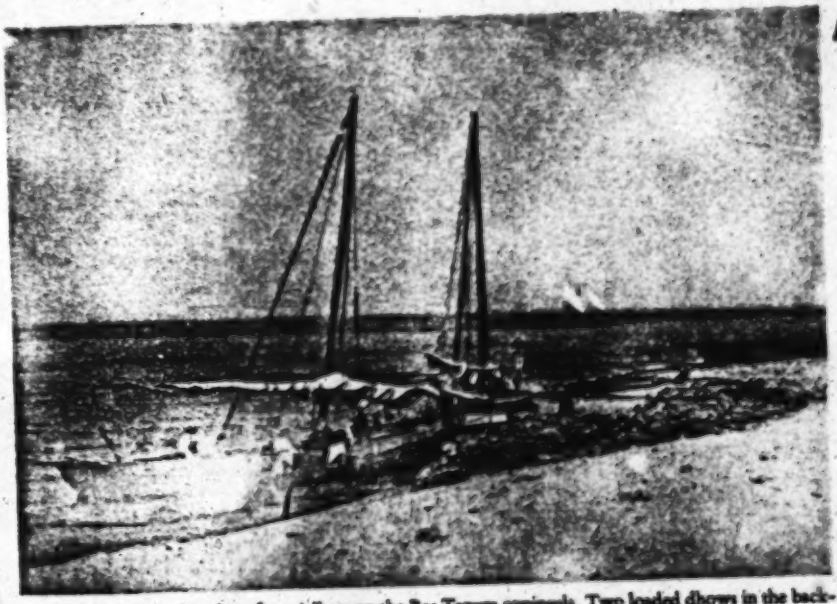

FIG. 15—Unloading hass from jalbuts on the Ras Tanura peninsula. Two loaded dhows in the background are bringing in more.

the water is warm. On the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia the minimum winter air temperature is in the middle forties, the shallow-sea temperature in the low sixties. From long experience the Arabs have found that they can begin deepwater diving in June and continue until the first week in October. At the start and finish of the season the surface-water temperature is about 85°, but the deep-water temperature is considerably less; the maximum surface-water temperature may exceed 100° in August. Before this main season the *ghaus al-kabir* (great diving), there is a season of about two months, known as the *ghaus al-barid* (cold diving), when smaller boats work the shallower waters near their home ports; during the winter many men go out as "waders" at low tide to pick up what they can just below tide level.

[1] See also R. LeB. Bowen, Jr.: The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf, *Middle East Journ.*, Vol. 5, 1951, pp. 161–180.

3: Bowen · C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

228 Each diver has two lines, one attached to a stone or iron diving weight; so that they will not become fouled, they are passed over sweeps left projecting over the gunwales athwartship and lashed down to the tholepins. The diver puts his feet into a loop over the diving weight (or simply lets the rope pass between his toes), releases the rope by untying a slipknot, and, holding the rope tightly, plummets to the bottom. As soon as he releases the line with the weight attached, the attendant hauls it to the surface. In the meantime the diver frantically plucks all the oysters he can before exhausting his air. He usually crawls on one hand and one foot, propelling himself with his free foot and collecting the oysters with his free hand. He puts the oysters into an open-weave palm-leaf basket fastened to his waist or around his neck, or hitched to a rope (which he holds or which is tied to his body). When he is ready to come to the surface, he jerks this rope.

The maximum depth at which the divers work is about 12 fathoms (72 feet). The average length of time they remain under water has been greatly exaggerated: some stories say 5 to 10 minutes. Villiers,[4] who spent two months on a buyer's *jalbut* with the Kuweit fleet, states that the divers stayed under water from 40 to 90 seconds, averaging about a minute. O'Shea[5] spent some time with the divers of the Trucial Coast, and he also states that the time averaged about a minute, ranging from 40 to 75 seconds. Hugh Smith[6] observes that the Arabs are the best divers employed in the Ceylon fisheries, staying down from 60 to 90 seconds; he cites an authentic case of an Arab who stayed down 109 seconds in 7 fathoms of water.

228 461 Ordinarily the diver remains under water for about a minute and rests for two or three minutes; on a good day he may make 30 or 40 dives, totaling half to three-quarters of an hour, and by the end of the season he may have completed more than 3000 dives in 30 to 50-feet of water.

228 461 165 136 The diver's worst enemy is fatigue. He has little fear of sharks and, indeed, is seldom bothered by them, though O'Shea[7] speaks of an attack on 30 divers, two of whom were killed under water. Whitelock[8] states that the greatest fear of divers on the Trucial Coast is the sawfish, which has been known to cut divers in two. The creature most feared by the divers in the Persian Gulf, at least on the north banks between Kuweit and Bahrein, is a jellyfish known to the Arabs as the *dawl*, which has two- to three-foot

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[4] Alan Villiers: Sons of Sinbad, New York, 1940, p. 392.

[5] Raymond O'Shea: The Sand Kings of Oman, London, 1947, p. 137.

[6] H. M. Smith: The Pearl Fisheries of Ceylon, *Natl. Geogr. Mag.*, Vol. 23, 1912, pp. 173–194; reference on p. 182.

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 138.

[8] H. H. Whitelock: An Account of the Arabs of the Pirate Coast, *Trans. Bombay Geogr. Soc.*, Vol. 1, 1844, pp. 32–49; reference on p. 43.

136 stinging tentacles that can easily put out an eye. There is also a needle urchin (*Diadema*), first reported from the Persian Gulf in 1949.[9] This urchin has spines more than a foot long, which can cause nasty, slow-healing wounds. However, as the urchin is several feet in diameter, black, and slow-moving, it is more easily avoided than the dawl.

164 752 Pearl divers suffer from a variety of diseases, most of which can be directly traced to their occupation. Open sores and skin ulcers result from encounters with the dawl and scrapes against coral and other sharp objects. Suppuration of the eardrums, rheumatism, and nosebleeds are common. Inflamed eyes are always a sign of the pearl diver. Persian Gulf divers are more susceptible to the "bends" than divers who use suits, since they must surface as rapidly as possible.

262 461 Divers never eat while they are working. When the day's diving is finished, the diver has some rice, dates, and tea, but not much else; sleep is his only energy builder. Every 10 days or so the divers get a rest, and every three weeks or so the dhows put in for food and water unless they have been revictualed at sea.

228 312 502 438 In recent years Ras Tanura has become a center of activity for the pearling fleet off its shores; for the oil company's installations can now pump an abundance of fresh water into the water tanks of the dhows much faster than it can be transferred by waterskins. The larger vessels anchor for the night on the banks; the smaller vessels sometimes take shelter if it is available. Some vessels of the pearling fleet replenish their water supply from the submarine springs that gush into the Persian Gulf in numerous places along the Arabian littoral. Relatively fresh water can be brought up in a waterskin by a diver. One of these springs, marked by a spar buoy, is to be found a few miles north of Jubail.

228 The first duty of the day on a pearling dhow is opening the previous day's oysters, which are heaped on deck in a large pile so that no one knows who found the oyster which may produce the rare gem. The muscles of the oysters relax enough overnight so that it is not difficult to open them. Less than a third of the oysters yield pearls, and these are usually only very small seed pearls.

228 442 439 Pearls are sometimes bought on the pearl banks by brokers who travel around in their own boats trying to get the best pearls before other brokers hear of them, and trying to get a valuable pearl before a nakhoda realizes its value. But whether the pearls are sold on the banks or at Bahrein, they all end up in Bombay.

113 [9] A. H. Clark and R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., Echinoderms of Tarut Bay and Vicinity, Saudi Arabia, *Amer. Museum Novitates*, No. 1390, 1949.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

The Dhow Sailor[1]

BY RICHARD LeBARON BOWEN, JR.

I

487 SINCE time immemorial, cargo has been transported in sailing ships up and down the South Arabian and the East African coasts. As the medieval Sinbads and the ancients before them had done for countless centuries, so are the Arabs, Indians, and Persians today transporting cargo in sailing ships up and down these same shores. Today these sailors operate the last great fleet of deepwater sailing ships in the world, and because of the special circumstances, this fleet will probably sail on for many more centuries oblivious to the changing pace of life around it. Life for these modern sailors has changed little in the thousand years that have passed since the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor were recorded in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

502 133 114 The Arabs, Indians, and Persians are still able to sail their fleets of

[1] Credit for this article belongs in large part to Mr. Frederick Hunt, who, after reading the author's 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia' in THE AMERICAN NEPTUNE, wrote to the Editor and asked if a follow-up might be possible, 'telling something of actual life aboard a dhow, how the crew lives, watches they stand, living conditions, what they eat, their wages, etc.' Mr. Hunt's outline has been followed almost to the letter, with some additional material added to round out the study.

Shortly after the first draft of the article was finished, the writer was very fortunate to become a member of the American Foundation for the Study of Man Arabian Expedition, which conducted archaeological investigations in South Arabia during the winter of 1950. Almost a month spent at Aden and on the south coast of Arabia, enabled the writer to collect much valuable additional first-hand data on the life of the dhow sailor. The writer is indebted to Mr. Wendell Phillips, leader of the expedition, for his assistance in making this particular phase of the study possible. The writer is deeply grateful to Prof. W. F. Albright, vice-president of the American Foundation for the Study of Man, for his guidance and assistance in numerous details in the work. The writer is also indebted to Dr. Philip K. Hitti for valuable advice on certain points.

In doing any work on the subject of dhows, one must consult what Alan Villiers has written on the subject. By sailing with the Arabs on their dhows for almost a full year Mr. Villiers has obtained an intimate picture of the dhow that the casual observer will completely miss, or the serious worker may not be able to get, as the Arabs are rather suspicious of Europeans who investigate their activities too closely. The writer of this present article has drawn on Villiers' material to round out certain aspects of this article and to supply various facts and figures for which Villiers alone is the source. Most of such material has been taken from his entertaining book, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), which in further reference will be abbreviated to A. Villiers, SS. 113

A description of the various types of dhows mentioned by their Arabic names in this article will be found in R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia,' AMERICAN NEPTUNE, IX (1949), 87-132, and R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., *Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia* (Rehoboth: Privately printed, 1949).

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

however, if it sighted land, it headed straight for it, showing the sailors the direction of the nearest land. Certainly this would seem to indicate voyages of more daring than mere coasting voyages. There are numerous Sanskrit and Pali references to Indian trading voyages dating from about the third century B.C., and there is one Sanskrit manuscript containing a treatise on shipbuilding in ancient India, giving the sizes (ranging up to 260 feet in length) of dozens of types of ships.[2]

Zanzibar is the unofficial southern port for the lateen fleet sailing down from the north, although the Indians sometimes go on to Madagascar. Soon after the northeast monsoon has set in, lateen craft start to come into Zanzibar. Arabs come from the Persian Gulf ports of Basra, Kuwait, Bahrein, and Sharjah on the Trucial Coast of Oman; Persians send ships from the Persian Gulf ports of Bushire, Lingeh, Qishm, and Bandar Abbas. Arabs of the Oman ports of Sur and Muscat on the Gulf of Oman and Indians from the Gulf of Cutch and the Malabar coast all send dhows down to Africa. Arab craft also sail down from Aden and Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, while the Red Sea contributes its craft from Port Sudan, Massawa, and Hodeida. Even the Somali coast contributes to the fleet arriving at Zanzibar, with dhows coming down from Djibouti, Berbera, and Mogadiscio.

Kuwait is the largest maritime and dhow-building port in the Persian Gulf, with Bahrein a very poor second. While Bahrein cannot begin to compare with Kuwait from a maritime standpoint, it probably ranks ahead of the latter as an emporium in the Persian Gulf. It serves for all the entrepôt trade to the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, the goods coming into Bahrein in large dhows and being transshipped from Bahrein to Arabia in shallow-draft *jalbhuts* (see Plate 17—top). In 1939 Kuwait had 106 ocean-going *bhums* on the registry.[4] However, the majority of the Kuwait deepwater *bhums* sail to India, rather than to Africa, carrying dates from Basra. The mariners of Kuwait probably reached their present maritime status a little over a century ago. Palgrave traveled in the Persian Gulf in 1862-1863 and was much impressed with the maritime activity of Kuwait:

> Among all the seamen who ply the Persian Gulf, the mariners of [Kuwait] hold the first rank in daring, in skill, and in solid trustworthiness of character. Fifty years since their harbour with its little town . . . was a mere nothing; now it is the most active and the most important port of the northerly Gulf.[5]

[2] R. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping* (Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 19.

[4] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 399.

[5] W. G. Palgrave, *A Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)* (3rd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), II, 366.

228 361 505 However, a century before this, Kuwait was apparently noted more for its pearl fisheries (which are still important) than for its maritime trade, as Niebuhr related that in 1763

> Kuwait is a sea-port town. . . . The inhabitants live by the fishery of pearls and of fishes. They are said to employ in this species of naval industry more than 800 boats. In the favorable season of the year, this town is left almost desolate, everybody going out either to the fishing, or upon some trading adventure.[6]

In Niebuhr's time, in the eighteenth century, the Omani sailors from Muscat and Sur on the Gulf of Oman were the famed Arab mariners, for Niebuhr related that

> The inhabitants of Oman, although not fond of sea-fights, are nevertheless the best mariners in all Arabia. They have several good harbours, and employ many small vessels in the navigation between Jidda and Basra. To this last town there come annually fifty such vessels.[7]

In the middle of the last century Muscat was still an important maritime port, for in 1854 Osgood related that

> Several ports in the Persian Gulf are tributary to it, and some excellent ships and a large number of [*baghlas*] employed in coasting and foreign trade, are owned by the Banian merchants at Muscat. In fact more than half of the trade of the Persian Gulf is carried on in ships owned at Muscat. . . . The trade with America, which is carried on chiefly by vessels from Salem does not exceed thirty-five or forty thousand dollars annually. Dates and cash are usually taken in exchange for American merchandize.[8]

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In the present day Muscat has completely fallen from its former prized position and given way to Kuwait and Bahrein Island in the Persian Gulf. However, the port of Sur in Oman still carries on the maritime tradition of the Omanis and maintains a considerable fleet of dhows which have long been prominent in the trading along the African coast.

501 The craft that make the trip down the African coast from Arabia are by no means all large ocean-going vessels; craft of all sizes and descriptions come into Zanzibar. Villiers[9] tells of seeing a 30-foot *jalbhut* from Oman sailing down the African coast. Having owned and sailed a *jalbhut* of about the same size in the relatively calm Persian Gulf waters, I have nothing but the utmost respect for anyone with the nerve to sail such a small open boat several thousand miles in the potentially rougher Indian Ocean.

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[6] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), II, 127.
[7] Ibid., 122.
[8] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), p. 81.
[9] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 190.

or other dried fish, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, tobacco, grinding stones, and straw work (fans, mats, and baskets). It must be remembered that most of the cargo moving around the Middle Eastern waters in small vessels, whether dhows or small coastal steamers, is for the native trade and is destined for native bazaars, which are noted for the cheapness and poor quality of their wares. Once the dhow is loaded it is ready for the trip down the East African coast; however, the Arabs sometimes take a month or more to collect a full cargo.

Upon the *nakhoda* of the dhow rests the responsibility of getting another cargo for continuing down the African coast once the consigned date cargo is discharged. Invariably the *nakhoda* is the nominal owner of his dhow, so he acts as his own agent. As the cargo loaded after the dates are discharged is not on consignment, its selection is a matter of the *nakhoda's* judgment, with an eye to what will sell best in the African markets. However, a cargo that must be regarded as essentially on consignment is that of passengers. On some Africa-bound dhows passengers comprise a considerable portion of the cargo. The competition for passengers is very brisk, so that there is sometimes a race among the various *nakhodas*, who hasten to neighboring ports via motor launch as soon as their ships reach South Arabia to discharge their dates.

Through the dhows there is a constant flow of Arabs from South Arabia and Oman and of Indians from India. The immigrants usually become porters, hawkers, musicians, or beggars, but if they are very industrious, they may end up owning a small shop in the *suq*. Their usual aim in migrating is to work long enough so that they can go home after they save a little money; usually they never make enough to get out. Villiers[16] states that the Italian officials in Mogadiscio checked four thousand passengers on thirty-five dhows that were in the harbor when he was there in 1939. In 1937 the fare along the Hadhramaut coast between ports was three rupees.[17] In 1939 the fare from South Arabia to any African port was only eight rupees for men and twelve for women.[18] In Aden in 1950 the fare for natives traveling as deck passengers on A. Besse and Company dhows with no accommodations was 15 rupees to Berbera, Djibouti, and other ports about 150 miles from Aden; thirty rupees to Massaua, Mukalla, and ports about 450 miles away; and one hundred rupees to Jidda, Port Sudan, or ports approximately one thousand miles from Aden. These were fixed rates on the dhows operated by Besse; other dhows that

[16] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 404.
[17] F. Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 313.
[18] A. Villiers, *ss*, p. 78.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

were trading down the coast could easily afford to undercut these rates. 167

As was mentioned above, women are usually charged higher rates for travel on dhows; this is because they have to be segregated and usually manage to make trouble, unintentional as it may be. Villiers[19] gives a graphic description of the nuisance a group of women can cause on an Arab dhow. For centuries women have apparently been creating disturbances on Arab dhows, for Niebuhr, who traveled down the Red Sea on a dhow in 1763, relates that

> In our passage, we found ourselves in danger of a worse misfortune than shipwreck. The females, who were lodged under us, more than once suffered linen, which they were drying, to catch fire, in consequence of which the vessel must have been burnt, if we had not been alarmed by their screams. . . . Those women were indeed extremely troublesome and indiscreet.[20]

Besides the ship's cargo, every member of the crew usually lays in a 439 store of goods that he personally peddles. Each sailor is allowed a sea chest 505 (see Plate 22—bottom), which he fills with print goods, turbans, flashlights, razors, sarongs, cigarettes, and perfumes which are later diluted. The *nakhoda* usually has some rugs or carved wooden chests to peddle (see Plate 17—bottom). Virtually none of this material enters Africa legally, but is for the most part smuggled in. Most of these trivial goods are carried in by the Arabs personally. Villiers[21] relates that he saw one man wear three gowns and eight sarongs, then wrap more sarongs around his knees, and make six trips through customs a day. Sometimes they are detected and stripped, but that is part of the risk. Often the Africans come out in canoes at night and remove the goods in small quantities. Frequently Arabs travel down the African coast on dhows as professional smugglers, living only for the smuggling they can accomplish. This sort of trading has been going on for centuries, for Paris[22] related that '. . . leur navires sont de vraies caravanes dans laquelles tous les matelots ont un intérêt.'

For the Arabs and the Persians, the trip down the African coast is leisurely and slow. It is not unusual for a dhow to stay in a port for three or four weeks haggling over a cargo, only to leave without having transacted any business. There is no rush, simply because there would be a long wait for the southwest monsoon to set in and carry them back north, if

[19] Ibid., p. 78 ff.

[20] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 219. 113

[21] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 148.

[22] F. E. Paris, *Essai sur la Construction Navale des Peuples Extra-Européens* (Paris, Bertrand, [1841]), p. 9. '. . . their ships are true caravans in which every sailor has an interest.'

4: Bowen C-5 (1960) 1961 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

567 ported annually from East Africa to the Persian Gulf and Arabia.[24] The term 'human cargo' is no exaggeration, for slaves were packed in the holds of dhows with an eye only towards maximum capacity. There is an old sketch of a small dhow loaded with 156 slaves (men, women, and children) packed into the hold, on the bottom and on two bamboo decks above with only three feet clearance between decks (see Figure 3).[25]

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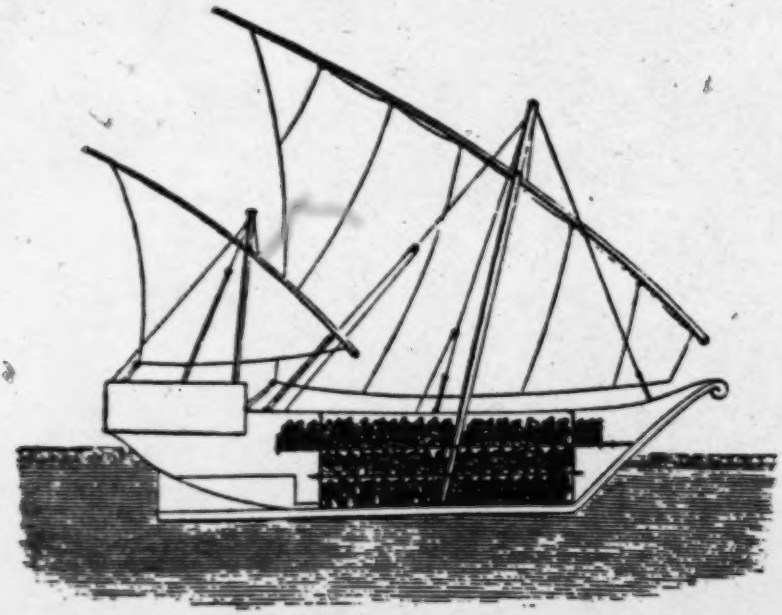

Fig. 3. Slaves packed into the hold of a small dhow, on the bottom and on two bamboo decks, with only three feet of clearance

567 Today slave-running carries such high penalties that no Arab would attempt it with a hold full of slaves on a long voyage to the Persian Gulf. However, the slave trade still operates on a reduced scale in the Red Sea between Africa and Arabia, usually utilizing fast *zarooks* and carrying only a small number of slaves. The trade is still active, mainly because both slavery and white slavery still flourish in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. These two countries signed neither of the two world conventions: the one in 1921 forbidding traffic in women and children and the one in 1933

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[24] Anonymous, 'Vessels Used in the Zanzibar Slave Trade,' *The Illustrated London News*, LXII (March, 1873), 208-209.

[25] Ibid.

forbidding traffic in adult women;[26] in 1948 these same two countries failed to file reports on efforts to suppress traffic in women, children, and obscene publications.[27]

Slaving is difficult to stamp out, as the African victims are led to believe that their social status will be bettered. Actually, there is some truth in this, for an African, even as a slave, has a far better life in Arabia, since the Arabs treat their slaves fairly.

British regulations at Zanzibar provide that dhows must carry crew members voluntarily signed on and not in excess of that needed to sail the ship.[28] At Mombasa, *British Regulations for Native Vessels* provides that no man may be signed on as a seaman without satisfying the officials that he has voluntarily shipped, and further that no passengers are to be shipped without the knowledge of the authorities.[29] However, Villiers[30] relates that an Omani *sambuk* intentionally ran down a fishing canoe off Africa and 'saved' two Africans to be sold later as slaves in Arabia.

In essentially the same category as the slave is any other illegal or illicit trade. During World War I gun-running was at a high, but now the trade is not very prosperous. There is considerable cargo smuggled to avoid duties; tea and other goods are run to Persia by the Arabs on the Trucial Coast of Oman—the old Pirate Coast.

The customs and immigration officials in Africa do not have much use for the Arab deepwaterman, with his Arab passengers and smuggling crew. On the other hand, the Arab takes delight in deception, and attempts to confuse the European as much as possible. No large dhow ever carries a visible name; its papers usually contain an official name, but more often the dhow is known by the name of the *nakhoda*, who is usually the nominal owner.

As soon as an Arab dhow reaches an African port, the local officials try to get a passenger and crew list; in this they never succeed, as certain of the passengers always vanish into the native anchorage as soon as the anchor is down, to return after the survey is made. This is easy, as all the native craft are herded into a separated anchorage and often new arrivals have to drive into small spaces in the middle of the anchorage.

Few carry passports or other identification, so actual identification is

[26] J. L. Carver, 'Slavery's Last Stronghold,' *United Nations World*, II, No. 5 (June, 1948), 24-27.

[27] However, in all fairness it should be pointed out that the USSR, Afghanistan, Byelorussia, Honduras, Iceland, and Norway also failed to make reports on the grounds that the problem has not arisen in their countries.

[28] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 212.

[29] Ibid., p. 190.

[30] Ibid.

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is often out of sight of land, at least on the Arabian side, as the Arabian side is treacherous and the coast low and sterile.

A dhow sailing from the Persian Gulf to Africa or to India does not actually go at all out of the way by coasting, as a glance at a map will show. This practice of coasting has the added advantage of keeping the dhow within easy rowing distance of land in case the ship should go down, a possibility never overlooked.

In contrast to the Arabs and the Persians, the Indians still navigate their dhows over open ocean from India. However, a glance at the map will show the reason—craft from India would have to go far out of their way to coast to Africa in sight of land. Thus by necessity the Indians have maintained the knowledge of navigation that the Arabs and Persians had mastered so successfully in medieval times; being able to get along successfully by coasting their deepwater craft, the Arabs and Persians have lost the navigational knowledge which in medieval times brought them in contact with junks from China in the waters farther east. When the Arab has to sail a navigated course, he usually, though somewhat reluctantly, gets an Indian navigator. It is interesting to note that the ancient mariners in Greek and Roman times successfully navigated the southern route to India using only the sun and the stars; the mariners' compass was not invented until the Middle Ages.

There is one other alleged aid to navigation in the Indian Ocean that was known to the ancients. Niebuhr traveled from Arabia to India via dhow in 1763 and related that

> The passage between Arabia and India was formerly thought very dangerous. Ships were carried on by so rapid a current, that they could neither keep their reckoning, nor distinguish the coast during the rainy season: several were consequently lost on the low coasts of Malabar. These misfortunes have ceased to take place, since an observation was made, which has been thought new, although Arrian speaks of it being known to the ancients; in the Indian Ocean, at a certain distance from the land, a great many water serpents, from 12 to 15 inches in length, are to be seen rising above the surface of the water. When these serpents are seen, they are an indication that the coast is exactly two degrees distant. . . . We saw some of these serpents, for the first time, on the evening of the 9th of September; on the 11th we landed in the harbour of Bombay.[22]

On the run down to Africa the Arabs sail by night as well as by day; at night they make sure they are well out at sea and set a safe course by the compass. With its many reefs the Red Sea is an exception, for even local craft with a knowledge of the way anchor by night and sail by day

[22] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), II, 373.

whenever they are near reefs. An exception to this is the slave-runner dashing from Africa to Arabia, for his activities are best carried on under cover of darkness. The reefs in the Red Sea are the main reason why foreign dhows do not venture very far into its waters.

In the field of navigation the Arabs are little impressed with Vasco da Gama's voyage, so famous in the West.[84] The Arabs take all the credit themselves; they claim that da Gama forced an Arab pilot to show him the way to India. Arab legend relates that an Ibn Majid, a famous pilot from the Persian Gulf, was delivered to da Gama by the Sheikh of Malindi (in present-day Kenya) as a hostage for stopping the siege of the town; the Arabs immortalize this Persian Gulf pilot and associate da Gama only with European intrusion into their territories.

The Arab dhow is actually not a very seaworthy craft (see Plate 19—top). It manages very successfully in fair weather, but in any kind of rough weather the dhow is likely to get into trouble fast. The *baghla* is apparently considerably less seaworthy than the *bhum*, as even Arab passengers (who are not particularly well informed about anything) prefer to travel in *bhums*.[85] Apparently the great transom stern of the *baghla* tends to make the craft unmanageable in heavy seas.

In the African port of Mombasa a Casualty Book listing all dhow casualties in the vicinity of the port shows that, while there were frequent accidents with small craft and less with larger craft, there was little loss of life.[86] This stems from the Arab's method of coasting close enough to land so that he can row ashore. However, no records list the number of dhows that have gone down with complete loss of life.

If the dhow springs a leak, it may often be disastrous. On a heavily-laden dhow the crew cannot get at the leak to repair it, and not having any pumps they do not even have time to start bailing. If they can get at it, the Arabs have been known to stop a leak where a plank was stove in by filling a cloth with rice, tying a string around the gathered neck and stuffing it in the hole; when the rice expands it fills the hole tightly.

Villiers[87] relates that a 178-ton Indian dhow loaded with mats sprang a leak and sank off Africa because the cargo prevented anyone from getting at the leak. The crew took fifteen minutes to clear the dhow, and very soon afterwards the sea was over her decks. The early English traveler Palgrave[88] had the same thing happen to him in 1863—an event which

[84] A. Villiers, 55, p. 197.
[85] Ibid., p. 106.
[86] Ibid., pp. 191-194.
[87] Ibid., p. 193.
[88] W. G. Palgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia* (3rd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), II, 342 ff.

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sometimes it is too late, for it may have already gone overboard. The Arab usually has no lines ready when he comes into a mooring and he may just as often throw a loose anchor over as not.

Dhows never show lights of any kind at night, whether under way or anchored. Although British regulations have forced many dhows from various ports on the Indian Ocean to carry lights, there is unfortunately no way of forcing the Arabs to use them. This undoubtedly results from centuries of travel in pirate-infested waters, where a light at night served only as a signal for sudden attack from pirates. There is only a weak light in the binnacle with which to see the course; everything else is dark. Not even when in the sea lanes off South Arabia, in the Persian Gulf, or in the Red Sea, where freighters and tankers beat a constant path, does the dhow show a light. In case of collision at night, the boat that can prove that it showed lights has a legal edge.

At the West Pier at Ras Tanura on the Persian Gulf, there is often considerable movement of Arab dhows and Arab *lanchs* (kerosene-driven native launches). Dhows slip in and out of their mooring like shadows on nights so black that a dirty white sail could not be seen ten feet away. One night a *lanch*, all of which carry lights, hit a rock-laden dhow amidship and in a matter of seconds sent her to the bottom in forty feet of water. Native divers unloaded her, and she was eventually salvaged. Since then, dhows make a frantic attempt to fan their coffee fires up to a bright glow when they see any *lanch* lights approaching, but they still do not carry standard lights. It is an eerie sight to see the glow of a charcoal fire suddenly light up a large lateen sail directly in your path!

When sailing along their own coasts, the Arabs like to sail in two's and three's. This arises from the fact that piracy is by no means a thing of the past. For centuries piracy and robbery were honorable professions among many tribes along the long Arabian littoral; such a reputation did the piratical Omani have during the last half of the last century that the very sight of their characteristic *bedans* and *batils* brought actual fear to the population of Zanzibar.[40] Niebuhr noted dangerous conditions in the Red Sea two centuries ago:

> Although from pirates properly so called, there is little to be feared in the Arabic gulfh [Red Sea], yet, so unskilled are the mariners in these latitudes, that they dare not venture to any distance from the coasts. This timorous mode of sailing might expose a single vessel to the robbery of the Arabs; to avoid which, these ships sail in little fleets; four always setting out together, that they may join to defend themselves.[41]

[40] G. L. Sulivan, *Dhow Chasing* (London, 1873), p. 102.
[41] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 212.

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It was in the Red Sea that an American ship was plundered in the early nineteenth century; however, the pirates came from the South Arabian coast. This has been described by Osgood:

> Conspicuous among the former rulers of Dhafar was Seyed Mohammad Akil, who . . . was led by ambition and avarice to turn pirate. Among other prizes, in June 1806, he captured, plundered, and burned near the harbor of Hodeida, in the Red Sea, the American ship *Essex*, belonging to Salem, and commanded by Joseph Orne. Captain Orne had arrived in the *Essex* at Mocha with sixty thousand dollars to purchase coffee. He was persuaded to sail from Mocha for Hodeida by Mohammad Akil, who, keeping him company in an armed ship, seized the vessel soon after leaving Mocha, and slaughtered all on board except a Dutch boy named John Herman Poll, whom he carried to Dhafar. The young man was kept in servitude, educated as a Mahometan, married and had several children, and when last visited, within a few years, seemed perfectly contented with his lot, having nearly forgotten his mother tongue.[42]

While the Red Sea is now perfectly safe from such attacks, many areas of the long Arabian littoral in the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf are definitely not. O'Shea[43] relates that in the Persian Gulf as late as 1944 a large Arab dhow bound for the Trucial Coast of Oman with foodstuffs was attacked by a Persian dhow and the whole Arab crew murdered. Representations were made to the Iran government by the Political Agent of Trucial Oman; the pirates were supposedly apprehended and hanged by the Iran government.

Around the Kuria Muria Islands off the South Arabian coast, the coastal tribes are very piratical. Villiers[44] relates that in recent times the tribes on the Arabian coast near these islands have been known to seize ships at night, plunder the cargo, burn the ship and sell the crew in the interior. They have also been known to cut moorings at night, thereby allowing the ship to drift onto the rocks; then they salvage the cargo. This is apparently nothing new, for when Bent sailed along these coasts in the late 1890's, he noted the extreme suspicion of dhow sailors for the inhabitants of the coast:

> While at anchor we heard shouts and cries to come to land, but our sailors would do nothing of the sort. They said a single man might often be seen calling that he was wrecked, and asking to be fetched away, but a party of armed men would be behind a rock, and come out and murder the benevolent crew and steal the boat.[45]

[42] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), pp. 119-120.
[43] R. O'Shea, *The Sand Kings of Oman* (London: Methuen and Company, 1947), p. 118.
[44] A. Villiers, *SS*, pp. 292-293.
[45] T. Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1900), p. 279.

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the cargo the dhow had hauled was figured and the cost of the food consumed by the officers and crew was deducted, giving the net earning of the dhow. One-half belonged to the crew and was divided into forty-seven and one-half shares as shown above. The other half belonged to the owner, and represented his return on his investment; the owner had to maintain the dhows from his half of the earnings. As we saw above in the case of the figures presented by Villiers, the owner has little to deduct from his share of the ship's earnings, so his return on his investment is considerable. It is little wonder that Mr. A. Besse was recently able to give Oxford University a contribution of £2,000,000!

Over one hundred years ago, the French Admiral F. E. Paris spent considerable time in the waters around Muscat and wondered how Arab ships could at that time compete with the more efficient European sailing ships. Paris summed up his conclusions as follows:

> ... les Arabs qui les montent habitués au retour périodique des mousons, n'exécutent, en general, qu'un voyage par an ... [ils] entendent bien le commerce; malgré cela, ils sont rarement employés par les Europeans ... et, comme ils ne prennent que de très-faibles cargaisons, ce n'est que grâce à l'extréme économie des Arabs qu'ils peuvent servir pour le commerce.[91]

Only a decade ago, one hundred years after Paris, men of other lands were still wondering how an Arab sailing fleet could possibly survive in the present era of oil and steam; to satisfy his curiosity Alan Villiers dedicated a year of his life to sailing with the Arabs in their dhows. Villiers has summed up the reasons for the survival of the dhow fleet as follows:

> One reason—perhaps the chief—why the ancient trade with the monsoons down the Indian Ocean not only survives but flourishes is that the dhows warehouse the goods they carry as well as transport them, and it suits the merchants better to have 10,000 packages of new season's dates divided among a fleet of dhows, than in the hold of one steamer which will unload the lot in a day or two, and flood the market. Ten thousand packages provide cargoes for at least five large dhows; the dhow master does not care how long he takes to discharge his cargo, for his overheads are trifling, his crew works on shares and handles all cargo, and his vessel pays practically no port dues.[92]

While in Aden in 1950, the writer investigated the intriguing problem of dhow economics, as applied to the coastal craft operating around

[91] F. E. Paris, *Essai sur la Construction Navale des Peuples Extra-Européens* (Paris, Bertrand, [1841]), p. 9. '... the Arabs who man them, accustomed to the periodic reversal of the monsoons, carry out, in general only one voyage a year ... they understand commerce well; in spite of that, they are rarely employed by Europeans ... and, as they carry only very poor cargoes, it is only because of the extreme economy of the Arabs that they can be of use for commerce.'

[92] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 400-401.